



State of New Jersey

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March 31, 2006

TO: Regional Epidemiologists/LINCS Coordinators

FROM: Obiora Eze, M.D.
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SUBJECT: New Jersey 2005/2006 ILI Season

This is the twenty-seventh week of the 2005-06 influenza season in New Jersey. The NJDHSS Communicable Disease Service has been notified of two reports of respiratory illnesses in long-term care facilities this month; however, these were not culture confirmed for influenza, and appropriate medical treatment and infection control procedures were implemented.

Analysis of other surveillance parameters within the past few weeks to the present indicates that we have likely reached the end of the 2005-2006 influenza season in New Jersey. It has been one of the mildest seasons in the past three years. "Regional level of activity" was the highest level of influenza activity reported by New Jersey this season. The average ILI percentages for the different surveillance parameters this week are at their lowest levels; nursing home, 0.82 %; school absenteeism, 5.05%; and emergency department visits, 4.74%.

Throughout the season, 1, 441 unique clinical specimens were tested by the New Jersey Public Health and Environmental Laboratories (PHEL) and New Jersey clinical laboratories participating in the World Health Organization (WHO) and National Respiratory Enteric Virus Surveillance System. The numbers of culture-confirmed influenza A and B isolates were 102 and 4 respectively. The influenza A and B isolates were characterized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as H1N1 and H3N2. Additionally, antigen typing of the influenza A (H1N1) and the B isolates indicates that these strains were included in the 2005-06 influenza vaccine composition.

Hospital laboratory surveillance for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), often clinically indistinguishable from influenza virus infections, peaked early in the month of January, which is consistent with previous influenza seasons in New Jersey. The monthly RSV summary has also been updated for a better reflection of the trend in New Jersey.

During the season, the NJDHSS Communicable Disease Service also monitored influenza-associated severe illnesses and deaths among the pediatric population. Eleven cases of influenza-associated severe illnesses were reported. Three of these cases were culture-confirmed influenza A, one was culture-confirmed influenza B, and all others were influenza positive from rapid antigen testing. None of the cases resulted in deaths.

Sixteen providers actively participated in this season's "Influenza Surveillance Sentinel Providers Program". These providers will receive their "Certificate of Appreciation" as soon as they are issued by the CDC.

Human cases of avian influenza (H5N1) that were widely reported around the world have not been reported in the United States. To date, the cumulative number of laboratory-confirmed human cases of avian influenza reported to WHO stands at 186, including 105 deaths. WHO reports only laboratory-confirmed cases, and the latest reported human case was from Egypt.

This week's ILI summary will be the last posted on the NJDHSS Communicable Disease Influenza Surveillance website this season. As in the previous seasons, we recommend discontinuing the collection of school absenteeism data on June 1, 2006, in line with the school calendar, and resuming data collection next season in September 2006. Please continue submitting other ILI surveillance parameters (Nursing Home, Emergency Department, Sentinel Physician and RSV) data through the summer months. **The weekly reports will be generated but posting of the reports will only be done if there is a significant increase in the level of ILI activity.** These reports will be stored in our database and may be used as the state's baseline of influenza activity for the next flu season. It may also help us identify an early onset of the flu season or perhaps the entry of a novel virus into our communities.

We thank you for your timely contributions and commitment toward making this season's "Weekly Influenza Surveillance Reports" successful. Your cooperation and contributions are highly appreciated.

I am also using this forum to notify you that effective April 1, 2006, Lisa McHugh will be managing all of the state's ILI and influenza surveillance activities. I will remain in the Vaccine Preventable Disease Program assisting in other surveillance activities. It is with great pleasure that I express my appreciation for your support and cooperation during these years as the state's Influenza Surveillance Coordinator. I appreciate your cooperation and teamwork in the ILI surveillance activities. Thanks again, and I wish you the best and hope you will give Lisa all the support she needs in her new position.